

Community Preservation Act Town of Maynard

Final Application for Funding

Please submit ten copies to:
Community Preservation Committee
Maynard Town Hall
195 Main Street
Maynard, MA 01754

Project Title Preserving and Digitizing Maynard's Vital/Archived Records

Applicant/Contact Person Joanna Bilotta

Organization Town of Maynard, Town Clerk's Office

Mailing Address 195 Main Street, Maynard, MA 01754

Telephone 978-897-1300 E-mail jbilotta@townofmaynard.net

Signature Joanna Bilotta Date October 31, 2021

CPA Category (check all the apply: Open Space ☐ Historic Resources ☒
Community Housing ☐ Recreation ☐

CPA Funds Requested _____ Total Cost of Project _____

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Attach answers to the following questions. Applications will be returned as incomplete if all requested information is not provided. Include supporting materials as necessary.

1. Goals: What are the goals of the proposed project?

The goals of this project are twofold:

- Conservation of the original vital records of births, deaths, and marriages in Maynard
- Searchable Accessibility - to make the images of those vital records available for use by the Town Clerk and ultimately to the public.

The Town Clerk is responsible for creating and archiving the records of the Town since its incorporation in 1871, including, but not limited to, vital records of births, deaths, and marriages. Vital records are created and recorded daily by the Town Clerk's staff. The proper preservation of and access to these fragile original records is a major thrust for the Dept of Public Health for the Commonwealth as well as every town and city in the Commonwealth. The Maynard archive is the only source for these documents from 1871 to 1953, after which the Commonwealth Registry of Vital Records and Statistics was created and now stores a paper copy but has not made electronic scans. The job of preserving and scanning has fallen to the individual Towns in the Commonwealth. We must preserve and conserve these individual vital record documents (birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates) to halt further degradation of the paper documents as well as scan and digitize them into a searchable, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) format. Ultimately, we will not preserve the digitized records on degradable media

October 28, 2021

such as paper, disks, or microfilm; we intend to place them onto the Town's computer network. As the State rolls out additional modules of the Vitals Information Partnership (VIP), more pressure will be placed on towns to scan our archival records.

Since the original pre-application was submitted and the Committee advanced the project to Final Application stage, we have discussed the project with many other Town Clerks of the Commonwealth to learn from their experiences. One of the most important items each stressed is comprehensive analysis and planning, discussed later in this application.

2. Community Need: Why is the project needed? Does it address needs identified in existing Town plans?

Current Situation

The original vital records are bound in books measuring from 2.5x8x8 inches to 2x11x8 inches and number three books each year. The current environment of the vault is not a controlled climate environment, neither temperature nor humidity, contributing to ongoing deterioration of these irreplaceable documents. Another capital improvement project involves the proper upgrade of the vaults themselves, however the vital records in the books are of paramount immediate concern.

Daily, the Town Clerk's office sells certified copies of our birth, death, and marriage certificates for a fee to individuals required to produce them for other agencies, such as insurance, Social Security, State Department, Homeland Security, FEMA, Mortgages, State agencies such as the Registry of Motor Vehicles or Family Services, school registrations, health insurance, etc. We are handling the books, spreading the bindings, and photocopying the documents onto archival paper stock to issue certified copies. Once these vital records are digitized, producing them on demand in the proper format for issuing certified copies will streamline the issuing process for each record, but more importantly, will reduce handling of the original records which of course slow their deterioration.

The Project

The proposed project would involve hiring a suitable vendor to conduct and prepare a Conservation Survey for each of the volumes of vital records, then the actual preservation work would begin to : A) remove each record from the binding of the book, B) remove staples, tape and extraneous materials, C) de-acidify the original vital document and supplemental attached materials, D) scan the vital records and original supplemental documents (where possible into Optical Character Recognition format) , E) create and follow a naming protocol for identifying and ultimately retrieving the records, E) store and index the digitized records in the most searchable/retrieval form on secure, stable media and F) preserve or re-bind the documents using archival conservation methods.

3. Community Support: What is the nature and level of support for this project? Include letters of support and any petitions.

As the official "Keeper of Records" for the Town of Maynard, it is one of my statutory responsibilities to ensure that all our records remain in good shape, both for historic reasons and for public records accessibility reasons. In consultation with many Town Clerks throughout the Commonwealth, I believe Maynard is behind in this regard. Daily requests for official purposes are on the rise as individuals must prove who they are and how they are related. In addition, the Town Clerk's office hosts genealogists and family tree tracers interested not only in the information they glean from the Federal Census that occurs every ten years; they seek the details of the lives of their ancestors.

4. **Project Documentation:** Attach any applicable engineering plans, architectural drawings, site plans, photographs, any other renderings, relevant studies, or material.

Since the original pre-application for this project was submitted and the Committee advanced the project to Final Application stage, we have discussed the project with many other Town Clerks of the Commonwealth to learn from their experiences. One of the most important items each stressed is comprehensive analysis and planning. This would be achieved by having a Conservation Survey performed on **each and every** volume of documents. This would involve measuring the size, page count, assessing the condition of the binding used as well as the original paper. The result would be a database of assessment and cost to preserve and repair each volume. This activity would be performed by an independent consultant. Then we would go to bid to providers of the preservation service, insisting upon a treatment plan for each of the volumes of records so that we will know the cost, exactly what is recommended for each volume and why.

It is my plan to do the complete project in multiple phases over multiple years, however I am unable at this time to indicate the specific volumes to be conserved and scan until the Conservation Plan is completed. It is my expectation from the experience of other Town and City Clerks that this plan would cost approximately \$12,000 to \$16,000. The remainder of the funding would be used entirely to conduct the necessary preservation steps for only as many volumes as we could afford in that year.

5. **Timeline:** What is the schedule for project implementation, including a timeline for all critical milestones?

- If approved for funding in FY22, we would immediately engage a consultant for the Conservation Survey to establish the exact implementation plan. The Conservation Survey, lasting approximately six days, would consist of including assessment and writing the plan.
- We would prepare bid documents using the Conservation Survey, create a list of criteria to be utilized in evaluating vendors and issue the bid to at least three vendors of proper and current capability, security and reputation or by using a vendor from the State Bid List, to secure the best service and the least cost to the Town for ALL the volumes of vital records. The Town will include additional requirements of the selected vendor such as A.) the vendor must produce a scan for the Town Clerk of any document contained in the volumes while in the control of the vendor to ensure public access as required by Mass General Laws and, B) the vendor must provide a method to secure and limit access to vital records impounded by Massachusetts law that would be identified by the Town Clerk.
- *It should be noted that by asking the vendor to prepare a bid for the complete inventory of vital record volumes in Year 1, we will facilitate future year planning and understand more fully the cost related to each phase of the work.*
- Based upon the amount of CPA funding secured, we would select the specific volumes of vital records to be conserved in the year.
- Volumes would be made available to the selected vendor for work in small groups at one time. Depending upon the specific plan of work to be done for each volume, I am informed that the preservation work itself typically could be accomplished over a couple of months per volume, largely depending on the capacity of the selected firm. Any CPA funds made available during a fiscal year would be spent and invoiced during that fiscal year for work performed during that fiscal year. The

project can be divided into small increments by selecting the volumes to be conserved and scanned, conforming to the budget while increasing the Town's level of control over the results.

6. Credentials: How will the experience of the applicant contribute to the success of this project?

The Town Clerk's office has access to enormous wealth of free resources for advice from the bulk of the 350 other communities in Massachusetts who participate in the Massachusetts Town Clerk's Association, from the very smallest towns and villages to the largest of cities. The Assistant Town Clerk and I routinely incorporate the advice, guidance, tips, and alerts of this varied, experienced group into our everyday work, whether involving elections, vital records, town meetings, records, Ethics, or Open Meeting Law. We would certainly take up the offers of many for more detailed information and free visits and "consulting". In addition, the Town Clerk's office has the expertise to determine HOW we want and expect to use the scans of the records to facilitate daily access and issuance. The staff of the Town Clerk's office is already trained in the use of the State's year-old Vitals Information Partnership currently used exclusively for newly occurring births and we've lived through various versions as the technology solution has been improved. Lastly, we would work with Massachusetts State Archives Records Management Unit to understand and incorporate their recommendations as applicable.

7. Success Factors: How will the success of this project be measured? Be as specific as possible.

One wonderful feature of this project is that success can be measured one conserved record, one volume at a time. Successful implementation of the entire project is certainly desirable, but each record, volume and scan can stand alone as a success as long as it is conserved, scanned and made usable/searchable. It is my expectation that each year the Annual Report of the Town Clerk would include a list of the volumes completed until all are done; that there is a finite end to the project and that the volumes conserved later might easily cost much less and require much less effort than those in the initial phases.

8. Budget: What is the total budget for the project and how will CPA funds be spent? All items of expenditure must be clearly identified. Distinguish between hard and soft costs and contingencies. (NOTE: CPA funds may not be used for maintenance.)

Only after the archived survey is completed would the full cost of all phases of the project be known and the number of years fully mapped.

I had submitted a possible budget in my Pre-Application for this project of \$200K, indicating that the project would be broken up into phases. Only after the Survey is completed will we know the body of work and specific total costs.

Therefore, for FY22 funding, I ask the Committee to fund \$100K for Year 1 phase of this project, comprised of the \$16K for the Survey and the remaining \$84K for the actual work of preservation and scanning. I fully endorse the imposition of a requirement that the Survey results must be documented and completed before ANY money can be spent on the actual work of conserving and digitizing. After the Survey is complete, a multi-year plan would be submitted showing the funding needs for each of the follow up phases to completion.

9. **Other Funding:** What additional funding sources are available, committed, or under consideration? Include commitment letters, if available, and describe any other attempts to secure funding for this project.

We are always on the hunt for other funding sources for our projects and work but we're of course cautious in this instance because of the fragility and irreplaceable nature of these vital records. I fully understand that there are genealogical organizations interested and capable to perform part of the scanning work but am cognizant of the fact that there are still two parts to the project, the preservation of the original documents and the scanning and accessibility of the images. Once the Conservation Survey is complete and we know what work is required, we will pursue all applicable funding alternatives. At this time, we have neither identified nor contacted any specific funding sources or organizations possessing adequate skill that are willing to trade resources.

10. **Maintenance:** If ongoing maintenance is required for your project, how will it be funded?

No specific maintenance of the resultant materials is required because of the project. The State's Archives Records Management Unit guidelines apply regardless of this project.